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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000163

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [FR](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: TWO-MONTH TARGET TO PRIORITIZE FRENCH MILITARY  
DEPLOYMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. PARIS 64  
[1](#)B. PARIS POINT 07 OCT 25  
[1](#)C. KABUL 241  
[1](#)D. 07 USNATO 610

Classified By: CDA Mark A. Pekala for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. French military and civilian authorities are "feeling the pressure" to step up France's military engagement in Afghanistan and are actively reviewing options that they plan to announce at the NATO summit in Bucharest. In addition to planning associated with President Sarkozy's decision to redeploy Special Forces (reported ref A), MFA and MOD sources indicate that the other most viable option is a move of the maneuver battalion currently in Kabul to RC-East, while maintaining French air support operations from their base in Kandahar. Embassy believes we may be able to convince the GOF to move their maneuver battalion directly to the south if we identify this to them as our clear top priority and work with the French to address mission, resource and partner concerns. We see little possibility for deployment of a PRT to Nimroz or Dai Kondi provinces due to firm military opposition. Current tensions with the UK over counter-insurgency policies, and force protection and chain of command issues with the Canadians and Dutch, add to French reluctance to deploy in the south. Finally, cost and capabilities are real concerns underpinning French military planning. Given the two-month window before the summit in Bucharest, we recommend that Washington prioritize our list of requests for French military engagement and work with the French to overcome concerns about deploying assets in the south, including engagement at the highest levels. DefMin Morin's January 31 meetings with the Secretary and SecDef Gates provide a first opportunity, followed shortly by the possibility for additional high-level engagement at the Vilnius Defense Ministerial. End Summary.

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MANEUVER BATTALION: GOING EAST VS. SOUTH  
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[1](#)2. (C) Sources in the civilian and military bureaucracies have all recently confirmed that French planners are focusing on moving their maneuver battalion, currently based in Kabul, to RC-East to focus on counter-insurgency and operations and training of the Afghan National Army. This would entail either relinquishing their Kabul mission to Afghan security forces, or having Turkey or Italy assume a greater part of the burden there. A move to the east satisfies several key French concerns: the mission allows French forces to be involved in challenging combat missions without dramatically increasing the number of deployed troops or costs associated

with logistics support; they can partner with U.S. forces with whom they share similar counter-insurgency doctrines; and it eases chain of command and force protection concerns. (NOTE: The French may reason that a re-deployment of their maneuver battalion to the east may possibly free up a U.S. battalion, which could then be deployed in the south.)

13. (C) However, SecDef Gates recently sent a letter to DefMin Morin specifically requesting that a French battalion be deployed in the south. DefMin Morin's trip to the U.S. for high-level meetings on January 31, is a timely opportunity to persuade the GOF to consider a move to the south as a compromise solution, if we can overcome concerns about resources, location and partners.

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PARTNERS: A KEY CONCERN  
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14. (C) In general, any move of French forces to the south raises the question of not only mission and location (i.e., whether they will be participating in hard combat missions in areas that are a strategic priority for ISAF), but also of coordination with specific allied partners. GOF sources report that military leaders lack confidence in both the rotating Dutch and Canadian commands (mostly over questions of competence at commanding operations at what is essentially a division level). At the same time, they regard the British as being overly aggressive in counter-narcotics efforts, too ready to cut side deals with Taliban leaders and over-reliant on kinetic engagement. In addition, there remain some hard feelings between the two countries following the UK's adamant refusal to assist the French-led EU mission in Chad by

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approving a common funding mechanism (NOTE: Our UK colleagues in Paris confirmed that a certain amount of blood and ink had been spilled over this issue between France and the UK; however, they assert that in the long-term it is in France's interest as well as theirs not to establish a precedent in which the biggest EU capabilities providers -- UK and France -- are expected to "pay twice" by also becoming the primary donors to fund EU operations).

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NO ONE WANTS NIMROZ  
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15. (C) In the recent PRT delegation's meeting with Lt. General Benoit Puga (J3), Puga firmly rejected any interest in Nimroz province because of its isolation, saying, "There is nothing there but snow and drug corridors to Iran." Both conducting and supporting military operations in Nimroz would require a significant air mobile capability which the French don't have available. It would also require a large investment in both civilian and military infrastructure, again implicating resources which the French forces don't have. Puga made clear that the French military is surprised that ISAF considers establishing a PRT in Nimroz to be a priority, as in France's assessment, the isolation of Nimroz diminishes its importance to the larger goal of building confidence in the Afghan central government. The MFA hierarchy supports this stance, albeit more on the grounds that they have no desire to exacerbate diplomatic sensibilities with neighboring Iran. The MFA was grudgingly impressed by the PRT team's presentation, particularly the information on the extensive interaction between the PRT's and local Afghan leaders, but they have acknowledged to us that they alone are open to the concept of a PRT and even they don't want to see a French PRT in Nimroz. One MFA source also reported that the French military dislikes PRT's because of the implied long-term commitment; they prefer to look at less open-ended military options. Given the staunch reluctance of the civilian and military bureaucracies on this issue, we see little forward possibility of convincing the GOF to stand up a PRT, either in Nimroz or elsewhere, within

the two month window prior to Bucharest, absent a direct fiat imposed by President Sarkozy (cited as possible in ref C).

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REAL RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS AT PLAY  
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¶16. (C) Finally, cost and capabilities remain the significant factor for French military planners (even if this is not always openly acknowledged). French military planners have a tacit requirement that French forces not be spread across Afghanistan as France does not have the resources to logistically support several, dispersed deployments. Integrating French forces into other national contingents is not optimal, because other nations often impose their national caveats on the small attachments. A significant move of forces, whether a PRT or a maneuver battalion, to the south will likewise significantly raise supply logistics costs and call into question whether the French have the assets to support their own forces. Lower-level personnel admit openly that the French don't have the capabilities -- particularly helicopter assets -- that they need to support an operation in the south. The MOD is already bracing for expected budgetary and personnel cuts upon completion of the white paper review of defense and security priorities (with publication expected in April/May as reported in previous Paris Points). Even if the total defense budget is maintained at 2% of GDP as the President has pledged, press reports cite the Elysee (Presidency) sources to suggest France may suppress between 20,000 and 50,000 positions in the armed forces between now and 2011 (17% of the total personnel). Budgets for new equipment are also expected to be affected.

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COMMENT: THE SARKOZY WILD CARD  
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¶17. (S) Comment and recommendation: We have approached the GOF at different times with requests for a variety of military options in Afghanistan (including helicopters, additional OMLTs, a PRT, Special Forces and re-deployment of their maneuver battalion). However, we have not told the French which requests we consider to be the most crucial

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(refs C and D). French planning is now coalescing around re-deployment of Special Forces and a possible move of the French maneuver battalion from Kabul to RC-East. Our time frame to affect these decisions is narrowing, with the deadline for decisions focused on the NATO summit in Bucharest only two months from now. As always, the French President remains the wild card in this process; he is perfectly capable of overruling the civilian and military leadership (as we have seen in the past when he agreed to deploy a French OMLT to Uruzgan, cited ref B), but his direct intervention is unpredictable, particularly as he will have a full agenda this spring with travel, municipal elections and an ambitious domestic reform agenda. If we really want to accomplish a move of the French battalion to the south, we recommend that we clarify to them that this is the top USG priority, including at the highest levels. End comment.

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